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Tuesday, March 19, 2019

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1 – State regulators: No 'immediate health concerns' from Deer Park terminal fire, Texas Tribune, 3/18/19
https://www.texastribune.org/2019/03/18/texas-deer-park-fire-regulators-health-concerns/
In a statement Monday afternoon, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said air quality monitoring "had not detected any immediate health concerns at ground level" amid a multi-tank fire at a petrochemical storage facility near Houston.

2 - Deer Park plant fire: What you need to know about the chemicals, San Antonio Express-News, 3/19/19
https://www.expressnews.com/news/houston-texas/houston/article/Deer-Park-toxic-chemicals-toxic-poisonous-fire-gas-13696801.php
At least three identifiable chemicals are involved in the ongoing fire at the Intercontinental Terminals Company facility in Deer Park, according to plant officials.

3 - Plaintiffs ask for ruling to return oversight of coal ash disposal to the EPA, The Oklahoman, 3/18/19
https://newsok.com/article/5626248/plaintiffs-ask-for-ruling-to-return-oversight-of-coal-ash-disposal-to-the-epa
The plaintiffs in a lawsuit that seeks to void the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision to allow Oklahoma to regulate coal ash disposal is seeking a summary judgement from a U.S. District Court judge in the District of Columbia, they have announced.

4 - Opponents make case against Chaco drilling, E&E News, 3/19/19
https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/03/19/stories/1060127601
The San Juan Mine could continue to provide coal to the San Juan Generating Station, or another customer, until 2033, according to an Environmental Impact Statement.

5 - Federal study says San Juan mine could stay open, Albuquerque Journal, 3/16/19
https://www.abqjournal.com/1293426/federal-study-says-san-juan-mine-could-stay-open.html
Ethanol consumption fell in 2018 for the first time in 20 years, an industry group said today, blaming the decline on EPA's decision to ease ethanol blending requirements for some small refineries.

6 – Entergy announces plans for 3rd solar project in Arkansas, Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 3/19/19
https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2019/mar/18/entergy-announces-plans-3rd-solar-project-arkansas/?news-arkansas
Entergy Arkansas and NextEra Energy Resources have announced plans for a new, 100-megawatt solar facility near Searcy. Entergy says that if approved by the Arkansas Public Service Commission, the project will be the largest utility-owned solar facility in the state. The utility said Monday that the project is expected to be in service by 2021.

7 – How co-ops are bringing solar power to rural America, E&E News, 3/19/19
https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/stories/1060127583

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In 2014, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association studied what some of its members saw as a touchy subject: local electricity powered by the sun. NRECA, based in Arlington, Va., is the trade association for 900 local rural electric co-ops that came to life in 1942, when its members were dependent on coal.

8 - FEMA changes for flood insurance program put burden on riskiest properties, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3/18/19

https://www.nola.com/national_politics/2019/03/fema-changes-for-flood-insurance-program-put-burden-on-riskiest-properties.html

Climate advocates say an overhaul of the nation's flood insurance program being unveiled by the Trump administration will spur communities around the country to better plan for extreme weather, but could drive up costs for some homeowners.

9 - Coastal program saved billions by deterring development — study, E&E News, 3/19/19

https://www.eenews.net/climatewire/2019/03/19/stories/1060127581

A federal program has saved taxpayers billions of dollars in disaster relief payments by keeping environmentally sensitive coastal areas clear of buildings, roads and infrastructure, a new study says.

10 – Dillard University students test air quality in Lower 9th Ward, New Orleans Times-Picayune, 3/19/19

https://www.nola.com/environment/2019/03/dillard-university-students-test-air-quality-in-lower-9th-ward.html

On a windy, overcast day in March, two Dillard University students stood on a viewing platform looking out onto the Bayou Bienvenue Wetlands Triangle in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward. A junior majoring in biology, Kia Smith, wore a mobile air monitoring device about the size of a lipstick tube around her neck. Her peer, Danielle Raphael, a senior majoring in public health, looked at real-time data transmitted from the monitor to her phone.

11 – FERC gives environmental OK to terminal near Texas refuge, E&E News, 3/19/19

https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/03/19/stories/1060127553

Federal regulators have given final environmental approval for a South Texas liquefied natural gas and export terminal in a migratory corridor for rare animals.

12 –3.0 magnitude earthquake shakes state, E&E News, 3/19/19

https://www.eenews.net/energywire/2019/03/19/stories/1060127551

No injuries have been reported following a 3.0 magnitude earthquake that shook parts of central Oklahoma. The U.S. Geological Survey says the quake was reported at 11:49 p.m. Saturday about 7 miles northwest of the Oklahoma City suburb of Edmond. It was recorded at a depth of about 5 miles.

State regulators: No 'immediate health concerns' from Deer Park terminal fire

> In a statement Monday afternoon, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality said air quality monitoring "had not detected any immediate health concerns at ground level" amid a multi-tank fire at a petrochemical storage facility near Houston.

BY **KIAH COLLIER** MARCH 18, 2019 12 HOURS AGO

Smoke rises from a fire burning at the Intercontinental Terminals Company in Deer Park, east of Houston. Jaimie Meidrum/Handout via REUTERS

A massive plume of black smoke continued to waft over the Houston area Monday after a fire broke out at a petrochemical storage facility over the weekend in Deer Park. Residents and workers also began complaining about respiratory problems including itchy throats and burning eyes.

But the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality — the state's environmental regulatory agency — said in a statement Monday afternoon that there is no need to be concerned about health impacts.

"As of 11:30 a.m. Monday, TCEQ had not detected any immediate health concerns at ground level," the statement said.

Local officials conveyed the same message, saying the plume was still too high in the air to impact people on the ground.

They also said the fire is expected to burn for two more days, but a shelter-in-place order for Deer Park was lifted Monday after agencies announced the air was safe to breath and no injuries have been reported at the compound, where 270 people work.

Rafael Perez, who works at a manufacturing facility just a few miles away, told The Texas Tribune that his throat started itching and burning at about 11 a.m. Monday.

"My co-workers had a rough cough or irritation in their throats," he said.

The TCEQ has faced intense scrutiny over lax air monitoring efforts since Hurricane Harvey — most recently over a joint decision with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to stop NASA from flying a pollution-monitoring plane over the hurricane zone in the weeks after the storm.

But the agency's statement Monday described an expansive air-monitoring operation after the fire broke out at the Intercontinental Terminals Company's Deer Park facility Sunday morning and spread to several tanks that hold chemicals used in gasoline, including naphtha and xylene.

The 265-acre property, which is on the Houston Ship Channel, houses 242 storage tanks, according to the company's website.

TCEQ said its environmental investigators conducted hand-held air monitoring in the vicinity overnight Sunday and that it deployed two additional air-monitoring stations that "are being strategically located in coordination with the unified command for the incident." The agency said it will continue conducting hand-held monitoring and collecting data from stationary air monitors in the area.

"TCEQ also worked to arrange EPA's ASPECT airplane to provide air monitoring flights over the area," the agency added. The name is an acronym for Airborne Spectral Photometric Environmental Collection Technology.

But environmental groups complained Monday that neither the TCEQ nor the company had released enough data to back up claims that there's no immediate risk to human health.

"They're asking us to trust their professional judgment, and they're giving us zero reason to believe that's true," said Elena Craft, a senior health scientist with the Environmental Defense Fund.

Craft said TCEQ has a history of lax enforcement during similar incidents. A 2017 Texas Tribune investigation found that thousands of rogue air pollution events — some far more dangerous than others — occur at industrial facilities in Texas every year but that only a handful of them garner fines.

"They should be held accountable for these kinds of incidents," Craft said. "There is little to no enforcement of these facilities."

The TCEQ posted some air-quality monitoring data on its website Monday, but Craft noted it was not up to date. A defense fund spokesman also noted that the TCEQ's stationary monitor in Deer Park hadn't been working.

Francisco Sanchez, a spokesman for Harris County's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, said on Twitter that the office had asked Intercontinental Terminals to publicly release its own measurements "for transparency." Local media reports Monday afternoon said the company indicated it would comply with that request.

The company did not immediately respond to requests for comment from the Tribune but tweeted Sunday, "The safety of our employees, our surrounding community and the environment is our first priority."

Despite claims of lax enforcement, TCEQ's annual enforcement reports and online databases show the agency has fined the 47-year-old company at least 10 times since 2002 — and at least twice last year — for various pollution incidents.

The company also has been in "significant" noncompliance with the federal Clean Water Act for nine of the last 12 quarters, according to an EPA enforcement database.

That includes an incident last year in which the company released more than 10 times the allowable limit of cyanide into the San Jacinto River basin from April through June.

Disclosure: The Environmental Defense Fund has been a financial supporter of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization that is funded in part by donations from members, foundations and corporate sponsors. Financial supporters play no role in the Tribune's journalism. Find a complete list of them here.

NEWS // HOUSTON

Deer Park plant fire: What you need to know about the chemicals

Julian Gill

March 18, 2019 | Updated: March 18, 2019 1:52 p.m.

Aerial view of downtown Houston on Monday, March 18, 2019, and a dark cloud over the skyline caused by a fire at a petrochemical plant in Deer Park.

Photo: Marie D. De Jesús, Staff photographer

At least three identifiable chemicals are involved in the ongoing fire at the Intercontinental Terminals Company facility in Deer Park, according to plant officials.

The fire initially spread to two tanks containing Naphtha and Xylene, two components used in gasoline. The fire spread overnight to more tanks, one of which was storing Toluene, a

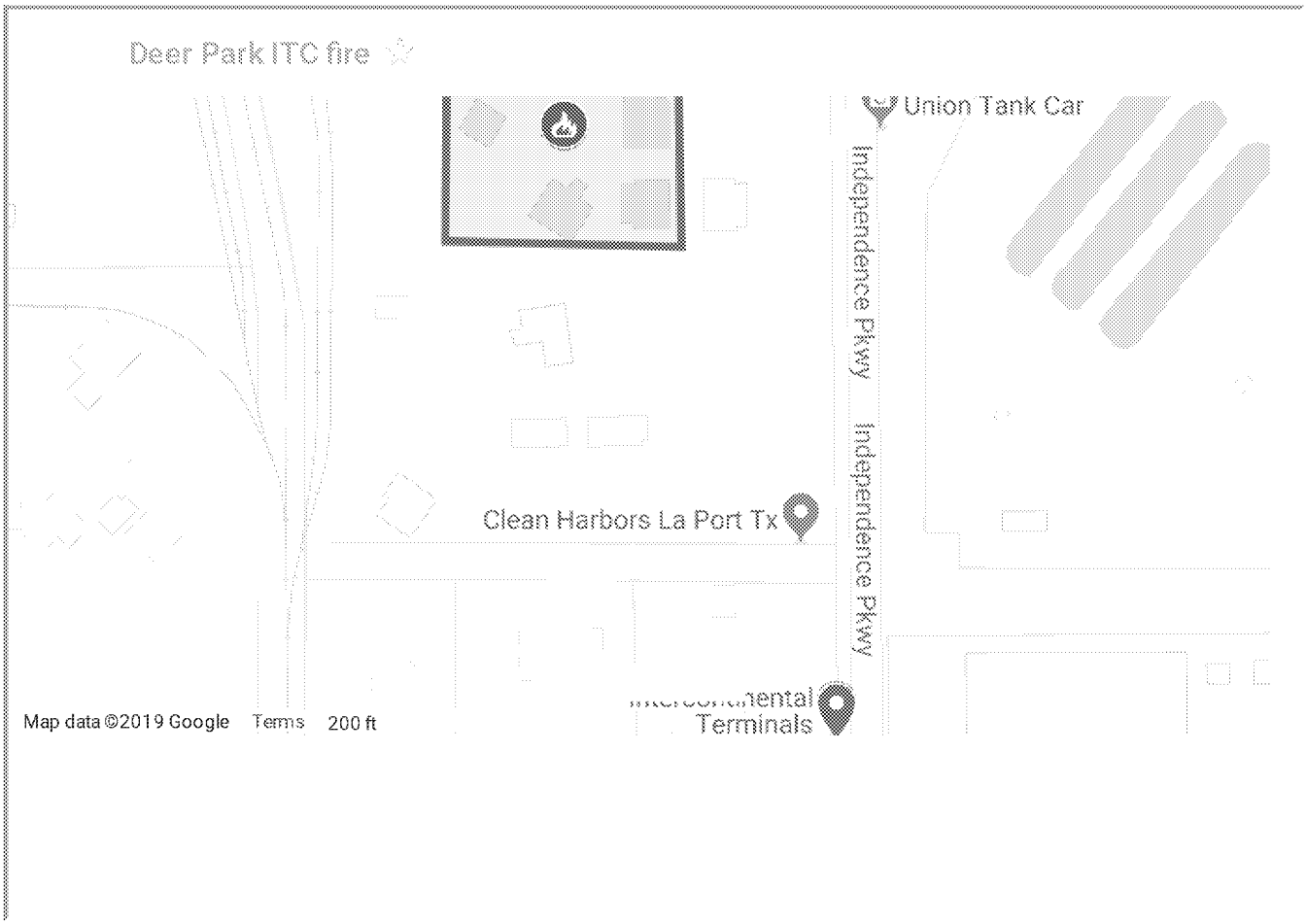
chemical used in nail polish remover, glues and paint thinner.

The fire has now been burning for 24 hours, affecting a total of eight tanks. While air quality levels were listed as "moderate" in Houston as of 9 a.m., health officials warn of side effects from exposure to these chemicals.

DEER PARK PLANT FIRE: Officials say it could last for days

Map of the Deer Park ITC fire

The tank with the fire symbol over it is believed to be the one where the fire started. The areas highlighted in red are where the fire is believed to have spread. The blue markers show other Intercontinental Terminal properties.



Created by: Ken Ellis

Naphtha can irritate the nose and throat when breathed, and poisonous gases are produced when naphtha is exposed to fire, according to earlier reports in the Houston Chronicle.

Luke Metzger, executive director of the environmental advocacy group Environment Texas, previously told the Chronicle that Naphtha can cause headaches, dizziness nausea and

vomiting in the short term. Long-term side effects include risk of cancer and risk to the nervous system, he said.

Xylene exposure produces similar side effects, including including headaches, dizziness, confusion and change in one's sense of balance, according to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease registry.

Exposure to Xylene at very high levels can cause unconsciousness and, in some cases, death, according to the registry.

Toluene's short-term side effects also include confusion, headaches and dizziness. Weakness, memory loss and nausea can also occur, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine.

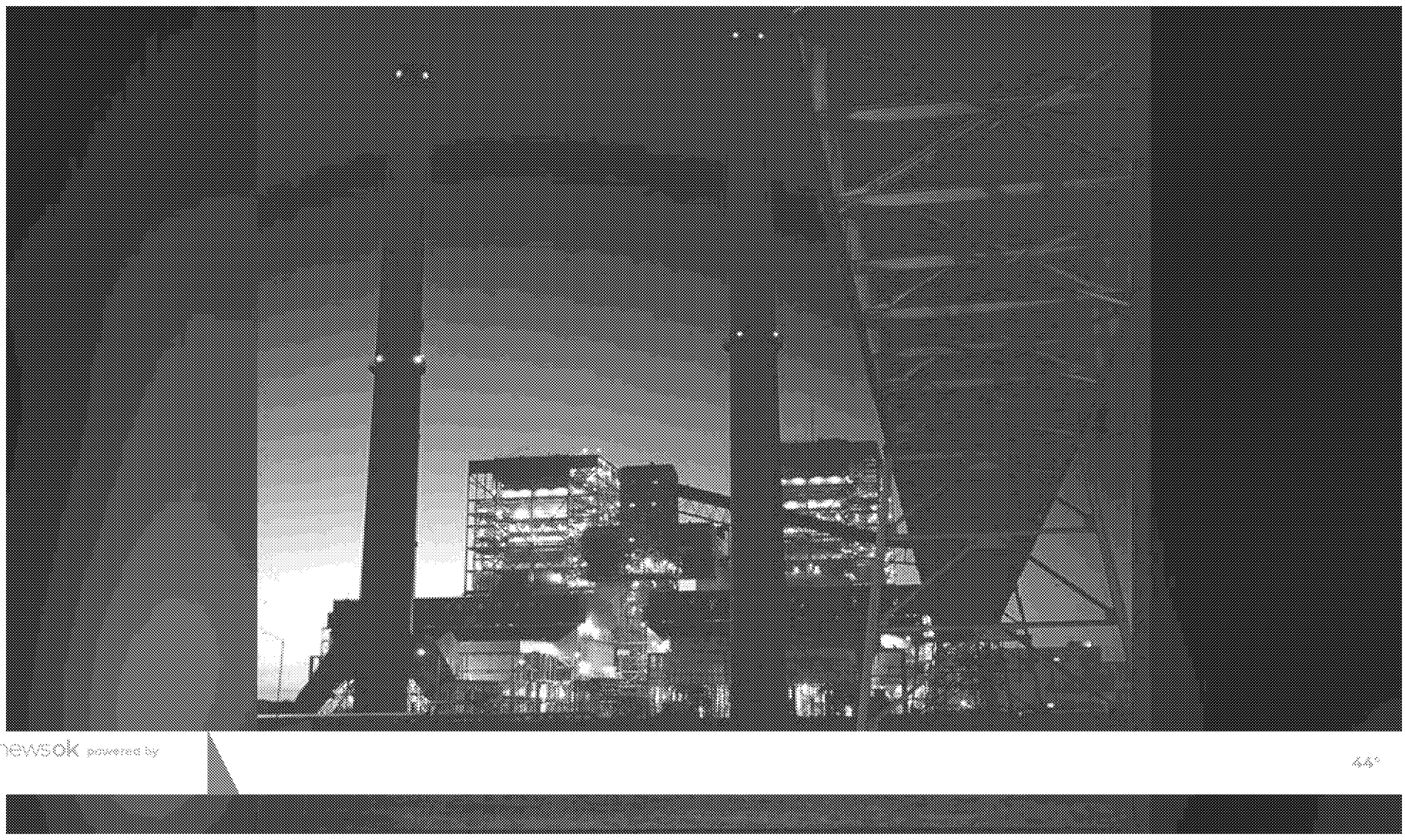
In the long-term, Toluene can cause brain damage, as well as damage to the kidneys and liver. Read more about the side effects here.

HOUSTONCHRONICLE.COM INVESTIGATES: Dangerous chemicals create hidden dangers in Houston

Julian Gill is a digital reporter in Houston. Read him on our breaking news site, Chron.com, and on our subscriber site, houstonchronicle.com. | julian.gill@chron.com | NEWS WHEN YOU NEED IT: Text CHRON to 77453 to receive breaking news alerts by text message | Sign up for breaking news alerts delivered to your email here.

Plaintiffs ask for ruling to return oversight of coal ash disposal to the EPA

by JACK MONEY
Published: Tue, March 19, 2019 5:00 AM



OGE Energy's Sooner Power Plant in Red Rock is shown. Oklahoma's authority under a federal law approved in 2016 to regulate the disposal of coal ash is being challenged in federal court. On Friday, plaintiffs asked for a summary judgment in the case. [Oklahoman Archives]

The plaintiffs in a lawsuit that seeks to void the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's decision to allow Oklahoma to regulate coal ash disposal is seeking a summary judgement from a U.S. District Court judge in the District of Columbia, they have announced.

Earthjustice attorneys working on behalf of plaintiffs Waterkeeper Alliance Inc., Local Environmental Action Demanded Agency and the Sierra Club filed the motion on March 15.

The motion argues that Oklahoma's regulatory regime is nearly identical to one a previous federal court decision invalidated.

Earthjustice attorneys Jennifer Cassel and Charles McPhedran also assert in the filing that coal ash is one of the largest and most toxic solid waste streams in the nation, noting it includes large quantities of heavy metals that can cause cancer and other adverse health impacts including reproductive, neurological, respiratory, and developmental problems.

In the filing, they argue that:

• The EPA, in deciding to give Oklahoma regulatory authority over the waste stream, failed to promulgate minimum guidelines for public participation in state coal ash programs.

• Oklahoma's coal ash program deprives the public of legally required opportunities for public participation.

• Oklahoma's coal ash program fails to guarantee protection of human health and the environment as required by the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act because it unlawfully allows unlined coal ash impoundments to continue to operate.

• Oklahoma's coal ash program does not satisfy act mandates that coal ash disposal facilities continue to comply with requirements as protective as federal standards because the program grants such facilities "permits for life."

• EPA failed to respond to Waterkeeper's comments on two of these issues in its approval proces
the final program approval invalid.

The Latest: Biden's verbal slip draws Democrats' cheers

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Friday's court action comes after U.S. District Judge John D. Bates denied a motion brought by EPA in mid-January that had asked for a delay in the case because of the federal government shutdown.

Coal ash, also known as coal combustion residuals, is a byproduct of burned coal.

In Oklahoma, the state's Department of Environmental Quality regulated its disposal under federal oversight for more than two decades. That changed in June 2018, when the EPA granted the state agency the authority to authorize its disposal under authority granted to it by the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act of 2016.

The EPA's decision allowed the state agency to fully take over the permitting process, issue notices, assess penalties and suspend or revoke permits.

After the decision, the lawsuit, which doesn't list DEQ as a defendant, was filed.

The March 15 filing notes coal ash dumps in Oklahoma are located adjacent to or nearby rivers and lakes, and asserts recent groundwater monitoring reports involving several coal ash landfills in Oklahoma show contamination issues that exceed federal standards.

Department of Environmental Quality officials on Monday offered no responses to plaintiff's assertions made in the filing seeking the declaratory judgment, following advice from legal counsel.

Earlier this year, however, they indicated permitted coal ash landfills within the state were appropriately protecting the environment from potential issues, as they use engineered liner systems that protect groundwater from contamination.

They also encouraged Oklahomans who were worried about potential coal ash problems to report those to DEQ, either by phoning 800-522-0206 or by clicking the "make a complaint" link on the agency's internet home page at deq.state.ok.us.

JACK MONEY

Jack Money has worked for The Oklahoman for more than 20 years. During that time, he has worked for the paper's city, state, metro and business news desks, including serving for a while as an assistant city editor. Money has won state and regional...

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The Latest: Biden's verbal slip draws Democrats' cheers

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PUBLIC LANDS

Opponents make case against Chaco drilling

Pamela King, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Green groups are fighting oil and gas development near New Mexico's Chaco Culture National Historical Park, which contains ancient Pueblo ruins. Ellen M. Gilmer/E&E News

Environmentalists yesterday made their case against drilling near the Chaco Culture National Historical Park.

Appearing before the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, counsel for a coalition of green groups asked to overturn a lower court's decision to greenlight oil and gas development near the ancient tribal site in northwest New Mexico.

"It was not clear at all where they might land," Jeremy Nichols, director of the climate and energy program at WildEarth Guardians, said after oral argument yesterday.

Samantha Ruscavage-Barz of WildEarth Guardians was the arguing attorney.

The judges were particularly curious about the plaintiffs' standing and the Bureau of Land Management's duty to study cumulative impacts from oil and gas development, Nichols added.

Plaintiffs in the appeal were stunned last year when a lower court tossed claims against planting wells near the park, which contains ancient pueblos, roads and other artifacts. Just a few weeks earlier, the judge had found deficiencies in BLM's analysis of cultural impacts from the wells (***Energywire***, April 25, 2018).

Opponents of drilling near Chaco contend that BLM violated the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act by using a 2003 resource management plan to back plans for more modern energy development.

Interior, which houses BLM, does not comment on pending litigation.

A lawyer representing industry intervenors declined an interview request.

The groups fighting development near Chaco include Diné Citizens Against Ruining our Environment, the San Juan Citizens Alliance, WildEarth Guardians and the Natural Resources Defense Council. The Western Environmental Law Center is also representing the groups in the lawsuit.

Arguments were held at the University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law as part of a student outreach program, Nichols said.

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Federal study says San Juan mine could stay open

By Journal staff and wire reports

Monday, March 18th, 2019 at 2:11pm

FARMINGTON — The San Juan Mine could continue to provide coal to the San Juan Generating Station, or another customer, until 2033, according to an Environmental Impact Statement.

The final EIS for the mine's Deep Lease Extension recommends allowing up to 53 million tons of coal to be removed from the mine, according to The Daily Times in Farmington. That would allow it to supply coal to the power plant for at least another decade should it stay open past 2022.

Public Service Company of New Mexico has said it intends to shut the plant by 2022. A far-ranging bill sent to the governor by the state Legislature will allow the company to sell bonds to help pay for the closure and provide economic help to the region. The bill requires PNM and other utilities to shift to carbon-free generation by 2045.

The federal Office of Surface Mining, Reclamation and Enforcement released the final EIS on Friday after years of working on it. A record of decision will be issued in April, according to a news release. The document and responses to public comments can be viewed online at wrcc.osmre.gov.

The final EIS evaluates three alternatives: keeping the mine open until 2033, closing the mine this year and keeping the mine open through 2022 when its coal supply contract with the power plant expires.

While most of the power plant's owners plan to stop receiving electricity from it in 2022, the city of Farmington is trying to acquire the shares it does not own. It has signed a non-binding letter of intent with Acme Equities LLC for the New York firm to take ownership of the plant and keep it open after 2022. It would need a coal supply contract with San Juan Mine to continue operations.

An OSMRE press release states the proposed action in the final environmental impact statement would add 10 to 14 years to the life of the mine. It states the mine supports 526 jobs in the Four Corners region. The mine itself accounted for 282 of those jobs in 2017, according to the EIS.

Entergy announces plans for 3rd solar project in Arkansas

by The Associated Press | March 18, 2019 at 1:42 p.m.

SEARCY, Ark. — Entergy Arkansas and NextEra Energy Resources have announced plans for a new, 100-megawatt solar facility near Searcy.

Entergy says that if approved by the Arkansas Public Service Commission, the project will be the largest utility-owned solar facility in the state. The utility said Monday that the project is expected to be in service by 2021.

The White County project will be Entergy's third large-scale solar project in Arkansas. Once complete, the project will allow Entergy to provide 281 megawatts of solar to customers in the state, or enough to power about 45,000 homes.

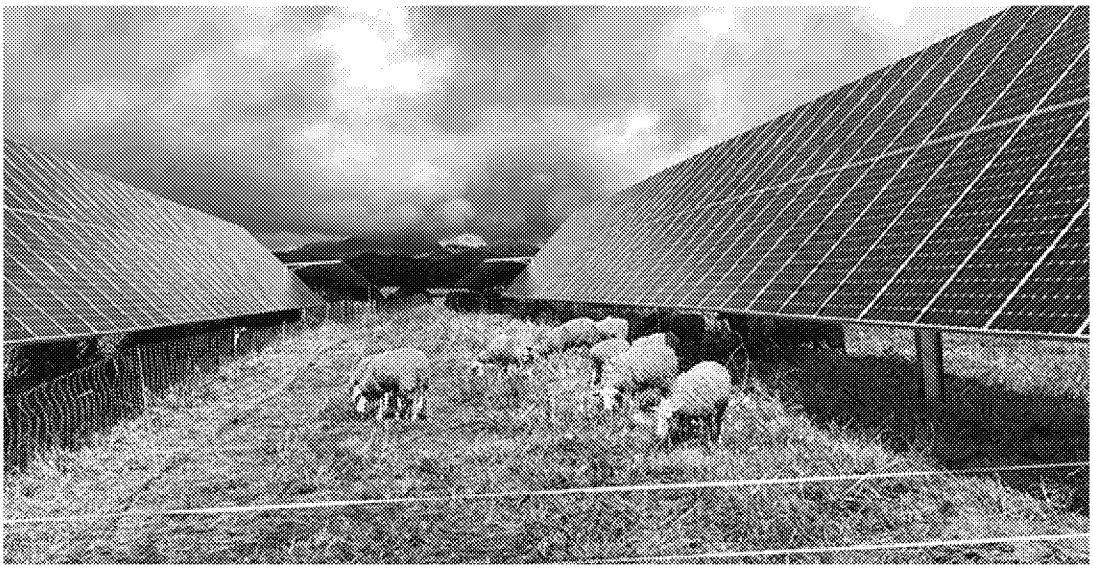
Entergy now buys solar energy from NextEra Energy Resources at a solar facility near Stuttgart. The company says it will also buy solar energy from a facility in Lake Village that's expected to come online in 2020.

ENERGY TRANSITIONS

How co-ops are bringing solar power to rural America

John Fialka, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, March 19, 2019



Earlier this year, Kauai Island Utility Cooperative and partner AES Distributed Energy unveiled a solar-plus-battery storage facility on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. @KauaiCoop/Facebook

The second in a two-part series. Read the first story here.

In 2014, the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association studied what some of its members saw as a touchy subject: local electricity powered by the sun.

NRECA, based in Arlington, Va., is the trade association for 900 local rural electric co-ops that came to life in 1942, when its members were dependent on coal. Many derived 70 percent or more of their power from coal, while just 1 percent of co-ops had gone beyond experimenting with solar as late as 2013, according to a survey at the time.

Only 20 percent of its 42 million members seemed interested in having more solar power.

But things began to change quickly.

By 2015, as Donald Trump was launching his political ambitions with a promise to revive the U.S. coal industry, multiple co-ops were building larger solar arrays and finding innovative ways to get communities to plug into them. This year, the solar footprint of U.S. co-ops will have grown 10 times as large in four years, a journey NRECA describes in a recent report titled: "The Solar Revolution in Rural America."

It began as a tough slog. Polls showed that co-op members viewed solar as exotic, difficult to manage and, above all, too expensive on a communitywide scale. As one member of a co-op focus group insisted: "Signing up can't result in a net loss to my wallet."

The coal dependency started during the Great Depression and was reinforced in the 1980s when the co-ops built a system using co-op wholesalers. These are centrally located coal-fired power plants with long-distance transmission lines that spread electricity over 56 percent of the nation's land mass. The system is financed, in part, by very long-term power contracts that limit local co-op power production to 5 percent or less.

But these contracts began to grate on local co-ops. Some of them were inviting outside companies to help them develop local renewable energy, particularly solar. One co-op based in Taos, N.M., waged a yearlong struggle with its wholesale co-op supplier, Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association Inc. of Westminster, Colo., to break its contract and replace it with a commercial power provider and a communitywide solar program.

The dispute had some nasty moments and involved $150 million worth of damage claims by the co-op power supplier, which accepted $37 million in a legal settlement. Jim Spiers, a newly arrived vice president at NRECA in charge of business and technology strategies, had been an executive at Tri-State and was involved in the early stages of the Taos matter, which he recalled as "part of a family discussion."

But imposing limits on local renewable energy has recently triggered discussions outside the co-op "family." Last month, Colorado's Public Utilities Commission said it would look into a complaint by another local co-op, the Delta-Montrose Electric Association of western Colorado. It asserts that Tri-State's limit on local solar energy is unfair.

Tri-State has responded by suing Delta-Montrose in local court, asking it to enforce the contract.

"These issues all come down to how our members relate to one another and share costs within the association," explained Lee Boughey, a spokesman for Tri-State. He said the contract was a private matter between Tri-State and its 43 local co-ops.

Meanwhile, Virginia's General Assembly has waded into the issue by raising a cap imposed on local co-ops, going from 1 percent on local solar energy to 7 percent.

Another co-op "family discussion" has been to find paths to more renewable energy at all levels. Under Spiers, NRECA's 2014 study of solar power morphed from an exploration into a "big education project," he said.

It was aimed at what might be needed if the price of solar-powered electricity came down. NRECA began working with a small group of local and wholesale co-ops. It published training manuals like "The Communicator's Toolkit," which suggested ways to minimize the risk of using solar while capturing its benefits.

That was timely because in 2015 the price of solar energy began to crash. "We happened to be in the right place at the right time to pull together our co-ops," Spiers explained in an interview.

Previously, the niche for solar in rural areas was mainly individuals putting rooftop solar on their homes. The new goal that emerged among co-ops was to connect as many local members as possible to nearby arrays.

Some members lived in apartments without solar. Co-ops developed "virtual net metering," which meant customers could still buy access to a solar project and get credit on their utility bill without connecting to the array.

Meanwhile, Tri-State has built the largest wholesale solar supply system serving co-ops in the United States, even as it has tried to limit the amount of solar that co-ops can generate. Another wholesaler, Great River Energy of Maple Grove, Minn., built 19 solar arrays that served co-ops across the breadth of the state.

Then Great River had to figure out how to adjust its system to cope with cloud patterns that slowly drifted across the state, cutting electricity at one co-op and increasing it at another.

The Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association in northern Colorado built two solar arrays that were quickly sold out. Then it developed a cheaper third array by bringing in an outside group called Grid Alternatives that used volunteers and donated materials. That helped Poudre attract more low- and moderate-income families and nonprofits.

Finding cleaner, closer power sources has helped trim NRECA's traditional reliance on coal from 54 percent in 2014 to 40 percent in 2017.

The champion in this race to innovate is probably Kauai Island Utility Cooperative in Hawaii, which began its peculiar journey of discovery in 2002. That was when a local group bought the Kauai power plant from a Connecticut company and turned it into a rural electric cooperative.

The buyers wanted local control and ownership of the island's power system. At the time, over 90 percent of its electricity was generated by diesel fuel imported from the continental U.S. That tied electricity bills to the global price of oil, gyrations that gave the island the most expensive electricity in the United States.

Hawaii enjoys legendary amounts of sunshine, but the cost of turning it into electricity by 2008 still seemed prohibitive. Nonetheless, the co-op's board of directors rolled out its strategic plan. It was to reach 50 percent renewable energy by 2023. "That was a stretch. Nobody knew how we are going to get there at the time," explained Beth Tokioka, communications manager for the co-op.

The co-op started with a trickle of hydroelectric power and then began burning wood from eucalyptus trees to generate steam. By 2014, the price of solar energy began to drop. That gave it room to maneuver. Kauai scrambled to build small solar arrays. By 2016, the co-op had built enough to provide 100 percent solar-generated power during the peak of the day.

As the price for solar kept dropping, the Kauai co-op began bidding on solar storage batteries, which were expensive but not nearly as expensive as power made from imported diesel. Tokioka said Kauai operates the world's first solar storage system applied to a community power grid.

The 29,000-member co-op built two of them and is developing a third storage system now. This year it will hit its 50 percent renewable goal for day and nighttime power, three years ahead of the time it predicted in 2008.

Kauai is now moving to add a more exotic source, a pumped storage facility. It will use solar-generated electricity during the day to pump water up to the top of a mountain. At night, the water will drop down into generators, spinning them to create electricity. That could push the island's renewable power into the 90 percent range. (Pumped storage is popular because the project has opened up more of the island's land for agricultural uses, Tokioka noted.)

Banking on its homemade renewable energy, the co-op is beginning to flourish, going from an almost 100 percent debt to a 30 percent equity position. The state of Hawaii has recently set a goal of developing 100 percent renewable energy by 2045. Kauai will now hit 90 percent in four to five years and reach 100 percent over a 24-hour cycle "well before 2045," predicted Tokioka.

"But who knows how technology is going to evolve in the meantime?" she added.

Email: jjfialka@eenews.net

NATIONAL POLITICS

FEMA changes for flood insurance program put burden on riskiest properties

Posted Mar 18, 5:44 PM

Bloomberg

Rescue personnel drive through an intersection covered with floodwaters from Hurricane Harvey in Dickinson, Texas, on Aug. 29, 2017. (Photo by Luke Sharrett, Bloomberg)

By Bloomberg News

Climate advocates say an overhaul of the nation's flood insurance program being

The changes announced Monday (March 18) by the Federal Emergency Management Agency represent one of the most significant reforms in the history of the National Flood Insurance Program. It will tie premiums to the actual flood risk facing individual homes nationwide starting in October 2020. The current system sets prices based largely on whether a home is inside or outside of the 100-year flood plain.

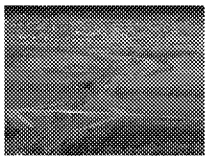
"This is badly needed," said Shana Udvardy, a climate resilience analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists. She called the shift "a huge step in the right direction, so we can let communities, particularly those communities that have been repetitively flooded, know what their actual risk is."

But the change risks increasing costs in the most flood-exposed areas, Udvardy cautioned. "We also have concerns about affordability," she said. "How do we protect those people that are historically disadvantaged and low-income, and that are also on the front lines of flooding?"

The initiative, which FEMA calls Risk Rating 2.0, follows a string of catastrophic events, including the Baton Rouge flood in 2016, Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in 2017 and Hurricane Florence last year. In each of those events, a large share of damaged homes lacked flood insurance, in part because FEMA's current system didn't accurately measure their risk.

"We have too much disaster suffering because we don't have insured survivors," David Maurstad, FEMA's deputy associate administrator for insurance and mitigation, said in a phone interview Friday. He said the recent disasters spurred the agency to improve

"The new rating plan will help customers better understand their risks," Maurstad said. "I believe that will actually increase the demand for our product."



Homes flood as Missouri River overtops, breaches levees

The overwhelming majority of American households with flood coverage receive their policies through the National Flood Insurance Program, which covers about 5 million policyholders, including approximately 3.5 million single-family homes. Despite the growing risk of flooding due to climate change, the number of policies under the program has fallen about 10 percent from its peak in 2009.

The pricing overhaul comes as climate change places growing pressure on the publicly subsidized flood insurance program. Claims often outpace premiums, saddling the program with a debt that topped $30 billion in 2017. The models that determine those rates ignore certain kinds of flooding, like heavy precipitation. And many Americans at risk of flooding nonetheless don't buy insurance.

Maurstad said the agency doesn't yet know what effect the change will have on total premiums. "We're not going to design it to either increase or decrease revenue," he said Friday. "Our effort is to improve our product and price it more fairly."

In a follow-up email, FEMA press secretary Elizabeth Litzow said the new approach

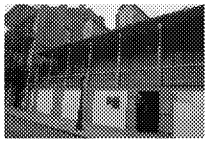
"Risk Rating 2.0 will be introducing new sources of flooding, such as intense rainfall, that have not been previously considered in the rating structure," Litzow wrote. "While these new sources of flooding have a lesser impact on risk and rates than those already considered, their introduction could result in the increased premium levels."

Under the change, FEMA will use private-sector data to calculate the real flood threat for each home. A briefing document used by the agency last October offers the example of two homes in a 100-year flood plain. The first home, at the edge of that zone, faces low risk of flooding from inland flooding or storm surge; the second faces higher risk from both.

Under the current system, each home pays the same premium. With the changes, the first home's premiums would fall by 57 percent, while premiums for the second home would more than double.

Rates are likely to go up in neighborhoods with the greatest exposure to flood risks, which could hurt property values in those areas, according to Michael Berman, a former chairman of the Mortgage Bankers Association who worked on housing issues for the Obama administration and has been briefed on the plan.

Still, Berman said the initiative was an important one. "Anything that they can do to improve people's understanding of flood risk compared to binary 100-year flood plain is good for consumers and good for investors in the long run, even if it raises premiums," he said.



How to flood-proof a house? Look to colonial New Orleans architecture

Increasing the cost of flood insurance tends to depress home values for two reasons, according to Asaf Bernstein, an economist at the University of Colorado at Boulder whose research includes asset pricing and household finance. Not only do higher premiums raise the cost of owning a home; they also act as a warning to potential buyers about the likelihood that a house will flood.

Past attempts to base flood insurance premiums on risk have sparked political blowback. In 2012, Congress passed changes that would impose premiums that reflected the full risk for homes, only to back down two years later in the face of intense public opposition.

What's different now, and what Maurstad said helped prompt FEMA to overhaul its pricing structure, is that the flooding has gotten worse.

"We're seeing more intense events," Maurstad said. "We're going to have a program that's going to be able to serve the nation better in the years to *come.*"

- Christopher Flavelle (c) 2019, Bloomberg

MITIGATION

Coastal program saved billions by deterring development — study

Thomas Frank, E&E News reporter

Published: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia following Superstorm Sandy. The storm created an inlet between Swan Cove and the Atlantic Ocean. Fish and Wildlife Service/Flickr

A federal program has saved taxpayers billions of dollars in disaster relief payments by keeping environmentally sensitive coastal areas clear of buildings, roads and infrastructure, a new study says.

The Coastal Barrier Resources System averted $9.5 billion in federal disaster aid from 1989 through 2013 by deterring development in 3.5 million acres along the East Coast, Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes, according to the study.

The system, created in 1982, will save federal taxpayers as much as $109 billion more over the next 50 years, the study by two university researchers says.

The analysis is one of the only attempts to quantify the program's savings. It comes as Congress and the administration are expanding the coastal barrier system to include nearly 300,000 additional acres on the East Coast. Most of the newly protected acreage is in areas that Superstorm Sandy destroyed in 2012. More than half sits along the New Jersey and Virginia coasts.

"This study tells us [the system] works exactly the way it's supposed to," said Karen Hyun, vice president for coastal conservation at the National Audubon Society, a nonprofit that protects birds and their habitats. "It delivers massive federal savings plus environmental protections that help coastal communities withstand deadly storms and hurricanes."

The society paid $7,500 for the study, which was conducted by Andrew Coburn of Western Carolina University's Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines and economist John Whitehead of Appalachian State University in North Carolina. It was published Friday in the *Journal of Coastal Research*.

The coastal barrier system discourages development by making designated areas ineligible for most federal money and programs such as disaster relief and federal flood insurance. The system uses incentives rather than development restrictions to conserve hurricane-prone biologically rich coastal barriers from Maine to Florida to Texas and in small sections along the shores of all five Great Lakes.

"This is something that's bipartisan and has shown success even in a very partisan Congress last year," Hyun said, referring to a law enacted in December that added 18,000 acres to the coastal barrier system in Delaware, the Carolinas and Florida.

At the same time, the Interior Department's Fish and Wildlife Service, which runs the program, is adding 275,000 acres of coastal land from New Hampshire to Virginia that was damaged by Sandy.

Martha Balis-Larsen of FWS said in a statement responding to the study that the program "continues to save American taxpayers millions of dollars by removing federal incentives to build in areas subject to hurricanes and erosion. This non-regulatory approach is minimizing threats to human life and property and conserving America's coastal barrier habitats."

The study appears to be the first in 17 years to estimate the taxpayer savings of the coastal barrier system. The Fish and Wildlife Service projected in 2002 that the program would save $1.3 billion in federal spending from its inception in 1982 to 2010. The study was calculated using 1996 dollars, which amounts to $2.1 billion in current dollars.

The FWS study did not anticipate massive coastal disasters, from Hurricane Katrina in 2005 to Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

The new study estimates future savings using varying estimates of storm damage and development that would have occurred in the coastal barriers if they were not in the federal system. Savings are estimated at $4 billion to $17 billion over the next 10 years, $9 billion to $63 billion over 30 years, and $11 billion to $109 billion over 50 years.

More than 95 percent of the 275,000 acres being added in Sandy-damaged areas is already considered aquatic habitat, according to FWS. Only 3,272 acres is privately owned and suitable for development.

Although most of the 275,000 acres could not be developed even without being included in the coastal barrier system, the new designation will prevent or discourage activity such as dredging by the Army Corps of Engineers and the construction of roads and bridges, Hyun said.

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ENVIRONMENT

Dillard University students test air quality in Lower 9th Ward

Posted Mar 18, 2:03 PM

11

Gallery: Lower 9th Ward air testing

4

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By Sara Sneath, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

On a windy, overcast day in March, two Dillard University students stood on a viewing platform looking out onto the Bayou Bienvenue Wetlands Triangle in New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward. A junior majoring in biology, Kia Smith, wore a mobile air monitoring device about the size of a lipstick tube around her neck. Her peer, Danielle Raphael, a

Raphael's cell phone screen lit up orange, a warning that the monitor was detecting elevated levels of volatile organic compounds. These compounds can irritate the eyes, nose and throat, according to the American Lung Association. The monitor doesn't indicate the source of the pollutants, but has a 0 to 100 scale indicating the severity of air pollution (0 being severely polluted and 100 indicating clean air.)

The students were there as part of an effort to use mobile air monitors to test levels of volatile organic compounds in the area, to set a baseline for comparison in the future as some worry that proposed projects nearby could affect air quality.

They are testing at three sites in the Lower 9th Ward: the Bayou Bienvenue Wetland Triangle, the Industrial Canal and the Mississippi River earthen levee. They'll be returning to the sites to get readings twice a month until the end of the year.

Students are also collecting data from a stationary device that monitors particulate matter in the air. The device is located at the headquarters of the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development on Chartres Street.

The two women are students of Bernard Singleton, an associate professor of biology at Dillard University. Singleton's research project is funded independently of Dillard University. Singleton and the Lower 9th Ward Center paired up to pursue the air monitoring project after an environmental justice symposium held in the community two years ago.

At the symposium, residents voiced their concerns for two potential projects that could affect the air quality of the community: expanding the Industrial Canal's navigation lock, and building a new bridge alongside the Florida Avenue bridge. The goal of the air monitoring project is to determine the current air quality in order to promote projects that would improve community health, not make it worse, said Arthur Johnson, the Chief Executive Officer for the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development.

The students plan to publish the results of their air monitoring efforts in an environmental journal and present the findings at a neighborhood meeting. "I think this kind of research is very important to our community, to raise awareness," Smith said.

Singleton's students are also collecting data on air quality for three other communities: St. Bernard Parish, the River Ridge and Harahan areas in Jefferson Parish and Gentillly in New Orleans. Raphael is originally from Violet, in St. Bernard Parish, and is among the students conducting air monitoring there.

"A lot of people down there end up with cancer," she said. "I'd like to see the research on that."

By talking openly about their findings with the community, the group hopes to foster a collaborative environment, said Happy Johnson, the Chief Resilience Officer for the Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development. "It's not just for the community," he said. "It's with the community."

LNG

FERC gives environmental OK to terminal near Texas refuge

Published: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Federal regulators have given final environmental approval for a South Texas liquefied natural gas and export terminal in a migratory corridor for rare animals.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission on Friday issued its **report** on the proposed Texas LNG terminal at the Port of Brownsville.

Critics raised concerns about habitat of the endangered ocelot, jaguarundi and aplomado falcon. The terminal would be on about 625 acres near the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

FERC says construction and operation would have adverse environmental impacts, but those could be mitigated through planning, design, engineering and training. Recommendations include using electric motors to reduce noise and emissions, installing barriers to control erosion, planting native vegetation, and limiting construction during breeding periods.

A final permit decision is expected later this year. — *Associated Press*

OKLAHOMA

3.0 magnitude earthquake shakes state

Published: Tuesday, March 19, 2019

No injuries have been reported following a 3.0 magnitude earthquake that shook parts of central Oklahoma.

The U.S. Geological Survey says the quake was reported at 11:49 p.m. Saturday about 7 miles northwest of the Oklahoma City suburb of Edmond. It was recorded at a depth of about 5 miles.

There were no immediate reports of damage. Geologists say damage is unlikely in temblors below magnitude 4.0.

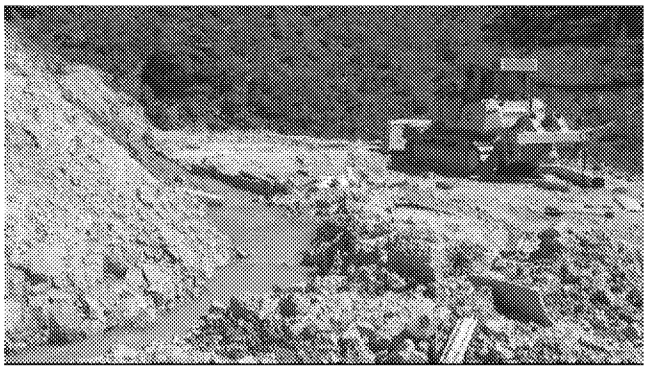
Thousands of earthquakes recorded in Oklahoma in recent years have been linked to the underground injection of wastewater from oil and gas production.

Geologists say about 200 quakes of magnitude 3.0 or stronger were recorded in Oklahoma last year, down from 302 in 2017 and the third consecutive year of declines since regulators ordered producers to close some wells. — *Associated Press*

After Outage, Gold King Mine Wastewater Plant Back In Operation

March 18, 2019 at 8:17 am

(AP) – A plant that treats wastewater draining from the Gold King Mine in southwestern Colorado has resumed operating after being shut down by a winter storm that struck the area this past week. The New Mexico Environment Department announced Saturday afternoon that it received word from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that the facility was back up and running.



Gold King Mine (credit: CBS)

The EPA says fluctuating electricity stopped the plant Thursday night.

The plant was installed after the EPA inadvertently triggered a wastewater spill from the Gold King in 2015, contaminating rivers in Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

Comments

MOST **VIEWED**

1. Staggering Losses Being Recorded For Farmers, Ranchers After Blizzard
2. Denver Ranks Fifth Among 'Most-Fled' Metro Areas
3. Copper Mountain Shatters March Snowfall Record
4. Good Samaritan Rescues Family's Car Buried 5 Days After Bomb Cyclone
5. CDOT Worker Eric Hill Killed At Job Site Near Gypsum
6. Jury Convicts Soldier In Murder Of Elbert County Rancher
7. $825,000 Settlement After Police Beat, Tase, Pepper Spray Diabetic Man
8. Colorado Blizzard Recap: Snow Totals, Wind Gusts And Pressure Readings
9. Dog Breathing Easy After Breakthrough Surgery Previously Used For Humans
10. Moose Breaks Into Breckenridge Home, Takes Nap

Santa Fe opposes EPA proposed rule change

By T. S. Last / Journal Staff Writer

Monday, March 18th, 2019 at 6:48pm

SANTA FE, N.M. — The city of Santa Fe is voicing its opposition to a proposed rule change by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that would do away with protections of waterways against pollutants adopted in 2015, and it wants you to do the same.

A resolution objecting to an EPA proposal that would change the definition of "Waters of the United States" already has enough sponsors for City Council approval. It passed the city's Finance Committee without comment on Monday and is scheduled for City Council approval on March 27.

"Should the proposed rule changes go into effect, the Santa Fe River and its watershed, including all ephemeral tributaries and arroyos, Nichols and McClure reservoirs, ground water, wastewater treating facility, public infrastructure, private property and the Rio Grande could lose federal protections," the fiscal impact report for the resolution states.

The resolution itself expresses support for expanding the definition of "tributary" and to "emphasize the importance of the impact of ephemeral flows to the health and welfare of the countries (sic) water system." It also encourages members of the public to file objections to the proposed changes before the end of the 60-day public comment period on April 15.

In a December news release, the EPA said the change "would result in significant cost savings, protect the nation's navigable waters, help sustain economic growth, and reduce barriers to business development." It goes on to say that the proposal is the second step in a two-step process to review and revise the definition of Waters of the United States to make it consistent with an executive order President Trump issued during his second month in office.

Acting EPA administrator Andrew Wheeler said that the "simplier and clearer definition would help landowners understand whether a project on their property will require a federal permit or not, without spending thousands of dollars on engineering and legal professionals."

A fact sheet put out by the EPA says that the rule adopted under the Obama administration in 2015 "may have greatly expanded Washington's control over local land use decisions."

But the city's resolution, sponsored by Mayor Alan Webber and five of the eight city councilors, says the city's drinking water and acequia systems already face significant impacts from climate change, stormwater runoff, toxic chemicals, waste and illegal dumping. It says protections of water sources should be strengthened, not lessened.

The resolutions says that ephemeral streams from Los Alamos National Laboratory drain into the Rio Grande upstream from Santa Fe would not be protected, imperiling one of the city's sources of drinking water.

Also on Monday, the Finance Committee approved a resolution to apply for refinancing of the 65-acre Midtown Campus, the former site of the Santa Fe University of Art and Design, with the state Department of Finance and Administration.

According to city documents, refinancing the bond the city took out when it bought the property in 2009 would save the city between $430,000 and $470,000 per year for the first 17 years. The term of the bond would be extended by three years to 2039.

Contact the writer.

SAQ ANSWERED [#]

Your Questions Answered: Understanding San Antonio's water quality

By **Sarah Acosta [https://www.ksat.com/author/sacosta]** - Reporter

Posted: 9:42 PM, March 18, 2019
Updated: 3:45 AM, March 19, 2019

SAN ANTONIO - *Recently, as part of KSAT's San Antonio Questions project, a viewer reached out to us wanting to know if San Antonio's water was federally in compliance and wanted an explanation on an Environmental Working Group report.*

KSAT reporter Sarah Acosta interviewed a SAWS [https://www.saws.org/] official to get some answers.

MORE NEWS HEADLINES

EPA announces new definition of protections in Clean Water Act [/news/politics/epa-expected-to-...

Raw, untreated water sample from well indicates presence of E. coli... [/news/raw-untreated-water-...

Lead, copper and uranium are all contaminants that are tested for in our water that you'll find in various water reports. Many agencies or utilities do their own reports, including the San Antonio Water System, state and federal agencies and nonprofits.

SAWS tests local water to make sure it's in compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency Safe Water Act. [https://www.epa.gov/sdwa]

“We test our drinking water over 7,000 times every year,” said Anne Hayden, communications manager for SAWS.

When you read these reports, including SAWS Water Quality [https://www.saws.org/Your_Water/WaterQuality/Report/docs/2018_SAWS_Main_System.pdf] report, the chemicals listed can be alarming, including radioactive contaminants such as uranium.

But as Hayden explained, water, even bottled water, will always have contaminants even when federally tested. She said when we see the list of contaminants on water quality reports, it doesn't necessarily indicate that the water poses a health risk.

The numbers listed aren’t an average, Hayden said.

“We are required to show the highest reading at anytime,” she said.

Hayden said the numbers you see on the report are measured in parts per million, some in parts per billion. Most are so small, they are not detectable.

“So, like, uranium, the highest was 1.3 parts per million,” Hayden said. “It's not something you need to worry about.”

The nonprofit Environmental Working Group [https://www.ewg.org/] manages a database that collects local water reports and EPA reports.

If you look up San Antonio water on EWG’s website [https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/system.php?pws=TX0150018] , it says there are nine contaminants detected above health guidelines.

Hayden said EWG’s guidelines are much stricter than the federal guidelines.

“Those are showing above their level of what they think is safe,” Hayden said.

When KSAT [https://www.ksat.com/topic/KSAT] reached out to the EWG, workers directed us to the group's website that explains its health guidelines [https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/methodology.php] come from its own research and go above the federal requirements.

“It makes it sound a little scary, but these are minute amounts in there,” Hayden said. “I think they are representing them high.”

She recommends when reading water quality reports to take them with a grain of salt and said SAWS works very hard to maintain its water quality.

“We live here, our families live here, so we want to make sure they are safe as well,” Hayden said.

To keep SAWS in check, the Texas Commission Environmental Quality acts as a third party and will audit the city’s water every couple of years to make sure it is in compliance with the EPA. To see the latest report, click here [https://media.ksat.com/document_dev/2019/03/18/tceq%20water%20report%20san%20antonio9
.

We want to hear from you!

What questions do you have about San Antonio: its culture, its laws or the city itself? Ask us below and we’ll do our best to get back to you with an answer!

What are your SAN ANTONIO QUESTIONS? What are you curious about when it comes to San Antonio’s culture, history, customs or its future? What questions do you have that you’d like KSAT to report on?